

Traveling Then & Now

By THE REV. CANON ROBERT MERRY

Once a year we hitched up Old Bess to the family carriage and drove to our grandmother's house in the corner where South Hanson meets East Bridgewater. Father would raid our meat ice chest (cooled by Round Pond Ice), bring out a loin of pork and perhaps a leg of lamb (selling then at 45¢ a pound). He would pick up a half bushel of potatoes from our root cellar with some turnips and probably carrots and we would be on our way. He felt sorry for my grandmother who had raised 9 children and he had low regard for his father-in-law whom he considered a meager provider. The entire trip would consume a full day over and back, including harnessing and grooming Old Bess. A short time ago, I served as interim minister in Bridgewater for a few months and the journey took about 35 minutes. This can illustrate one aspect of the change in travel.

When I asked Irene Walker in an interview to be placed in Duxbury's 350th anniversary time capsule (she was the oldest living resident in town) what she regarded as the most important change in lifestyle between her day in 1903 and the present, she answered without hesitating, "Speed." "Today," she said, "things move so fast. People rush around in fast motor cars and trains and airplanes and never seem to stop. In my day people stayed home more. This was where they felt they belonged. Today everyone is on the move going somewhere never seeming to feel satisfied where they are. A few owned horses and carriages but most of us walked. Stores, churches, post office and bank were all located within walking distance. Today nobody walks."

So I will begin this essay on "travel, then and now," with this fact of "speed." I will touch also on 3 other aspects of change in travel, then and now -- its relative low cost today, its vast scope, and I will conclude with a brief reflection on the apparent change in our culture these changes in travel have produced, particularly in relation to our basic outlook on life.

The change in the speed of travel is almost everywhere in contrast to our all-day trip to grandmother's house. Take for example a recent trip Harriet and I took to the Hawaiian Islands. In September of 1929, I traveled to Hawaii to take a teaching job as many *Clipper* readers have heard, at Iolani, a church-related boys school. The trip took 13 days and if I recall correctly, 5 by train across the continent to San Francisco and 8 to Honolulu by steamboat. Harriet and I took just 13 hours, 6 over land and 7 over the Pacific

with a stopover in Detroit and San Francisco. John Cutler says he traveled to Hawaii in World War II by way of the *Hawaii Clipper*, a flying boat with 4 propeller-driven engines. This trip took 22 hours. These changes in the speed of travel have occurred in the last 50 years.

If we may go back a few years more, we find that the stagecoach trip to Boston, after a change of horses at the stables and inn which was located just across the Pembroke line in West Duxbury on High St., took all day. Duxbury, being oriented to the sea, delayed accepting rail service until 1871 when the railroad was rushed through to accommodate the estimated 10,000 people who came to town for the laying of the cornerstone of the Myles Standish Monument. Up until this time, people preferred to go to Kingston to catch the stagecoach there at first and later the train. Duxbury boasted 2 livery stables, one of which I remember clearly -- Briggs' Stable, just down the hill and across Bluefish River from where I lived. The other was owned and operated by Harvey Cushing, whose 3 sons took it over and made it into a garage later at Hall's Corner. Joan Schleuter has given us a complete picture of travel in Duxbury over the years in the *Duxbury Book*. The article contains a photograph of the "barge," a passenger-carrying coach that used to meet the trains at South Duxbury Station (located then opposite the *Clipper* building) and transported them to the Myles Standish Hotel on Standish Shore. It met 12 trains a day when the hotel was in its prime in the mid 1880's.

A second difference would be in total costs. To buy land for rights of way for the railroad, and then to build locomotives and cars, and the trackage plus the railroad crews to maintain all this, was far more expensive than travel by air. Again, the overall cost of a steamer trip like the one I took in 1929, when you figure in dockage, building, maintaining and sailing the ship, and feeding, sleeping and entertaining 500 people, would also reach a sizeable figure. I have not researched this, so this is only a layman's opinion, but I think I am safe in saying that travel costs today, if adjusted for inflation, are much less than they were in my day. My steamer fare was \$110, and adjusted for inflation would be close to \$900, whereas flights to Hawaii from San Francisco are less than half of that.

A third difference between then and now is in the scope of travel. The range of people relying on foot locomotion or with horse and carriage was limited to neighborhoods. Schools and post offices and stores and churches were located with this in mind. Duxbury had several of these enclaves and in many cases people found their security and self-fulfillment here. Ashdod,

Tinkertown, Island Creek, North and West Duxbury, and Duxbury Village, were self-enclosed entities. If I recall correctly, Howard Blanchard our former fire chief, told me he was born and brought up on Cedar St., and never reached Hall's Corner until he was 16 years old. His furthest wanderings included Point School for his first 4 grades and the grammar school then standing just beyond the 2 churches on Washington St. For many Duxburyites of this period, Partridge Academy was the first place where all parts of young Duxbury came together.

When I attended the Academy we would hold contests between the different neighborhoods and boast about being Number One. In these early days, only a minority of the town's citizens could afford to keep horses. A cow and a pig and chickens paid their way by their several contributions, but a horse was sheer luxury. We had horses only because they pulled our meat carts around town. Father had this thing about work and pleasure. When automobiles came in, it was 2 or 3 years before he would consent to purchase a "pleasure" car. When you consider the immense public outlay of cash to subsidize the movements of the automobile it is easy to understand their relatively limited scope.

Another illustration of the difference in scope between my day and the present, is the trip to New York City my 3 roommates and I made in spring vacation of our senior year at Harvard. Right after Christmas, the invitation came from the parents of one of the roommates who were teachers at the Union Theological Seminary there. This was regarded as a fitting climax to 4 years at Harvard and an appropriate celebration. It was the experience of a lifetime for me. I had never traveled farther than Cambridge before this. Reservations were made on the Easter Steamship Lines that made daily trips overnight to New York. This event, so significant for us, is repeated daily today for some and weekly for many others who think nothing of it. It is simply a matter of business routine. Auto transportation can be accomplished to New York between breakfast and late lunch if there are no traffic holdups.

Air travel has so extended the scope of every individual it is almost incredible how far we can go these days. The world has indeed fulfilled what Marshall MacCluhan has described as "a global Village." People today think nothing of flying off to New Zealand or Australia. The B52's that bombed Baghdad in the recent Gulf War were based in Diego Garcia in the India Ocean. The round-trip they followed covered 5,000 miles. Ship and rail travel required certain conditions of sea and land

Gulf War were based in Diego Garcia in the India Ocean. The round-trip they followed covered 5,000 miles. Ship and rail travel required certain conditions of sea and land and some terrain forbade railway construction. Today, planes can fly over any and all types of land and sea surface. So skillful are the contemporary travel planes, that they can carry people most anywhere. The *Globe* general travel section carried not only invitations to travel in the normal manner, but had an insert entitled "Adventures in Travel" outlining special exotic spots where the adventurous may go. Helicopter sightseeing was one of these special invitations.

We were urged when we announced our Hawaii trip to be sure to take the helicopter ride on Kauai. So we winged our way over the cane fields and up across the mountain ranges and down into colorful canyons and were whisked along deep gorges and finally out to sea and along the beaches. It was an unforgettable experience. Flights are advertised over the South Pole. It must be strange to pursue the trails in this way that were first laid by Amundsen and Shackleton and Peary, who slogged behind their dogsleds fighting frostbite and fatigue. Such is the scope of modern travel. So far have we come from the early days when only a few were able to leave their own neighborhoods and spent their entire lives within a circumference of 50 miles.

Given all these changes in our traveling habits, a question does occur as to what change if any does this new ease of travel produce in the human spirit? Has our practical elimination of the "travail" from traveling made any change in our culture or in our outlook on life today? We have indeed moved a long way from our elderly resident of Concord who when asked if she ever traveled replied, "Why should I travel. I am already there." I hope I will not be criticized if I make a judgement that what our new traveling habits have done is destroyed what I will call the "loyalty to place." Our generation has been criticized as "rootless," and much time and energy is spent by individual people seeking their "roots" as this was the name of a recent best seller. In our recent trip to Hawaii we flew to Honolulu and boarded a cruise ship, sailing at night to 4 of the Hawaiian Islands and landing for "shore excursions" which were conducted in the daytime. The ship was loaded to its capacity (incidentally -- built in Bethlehem Shipyard. Quinev in 1952) of 757 passengers and 320

crew. Most of the travelers were from the Midwest and California and most were in their 40's and 50's -- I would guess, on vacation. There were a few elderly folks like us who as it was said, belonged to the "cane brigade," but what interested me were several in this group who never left the ship at all. They were along just to enjoy the weather and the companionship of other passengers. Indeed a few people we had met here on earlier cruises we had taken to the Panama Canal and to the Caribbean, seemed to love to be moving all the time. They seemed to me to be adrift and without any sense of belonging, but this may be only my own reading of the situation.

When our Pilgrim ancestors arrived here, land was allotted in 1627 to families on the basis of 20 acres per individual member. The first settlers continued as they had in England as farmers. We usually assume that they began with fishing as their main economic support, but this was farming. Only later, i.e. the late 1700's, did fishing become the basic industry and then in the 1800's of course, it was shipbuilding. Newcomers to Duxbury are surprised to discover that there are 7 houses in town date boarded before 1700. These people were anchored to the soil which they tended with great care and left to their descendants. There was a real sense of belonging here. Of course travel around Duxbury Bay was by boat and land holdings required water access even when water frontage was impractical, but the foundation of social and community life was the family rooted and grounded in land. Houses came to be called "homesteads" and home life centered around the hearth with its Bible as the norm of civilized life. This was the meaning then of the word "home." Home was where the heart was and the heart was firmly based in the soil.

There then followed perhaps a century of what I have chosen to call the "Peddlers' Era" when provisions to supplement what was home grown in the way of nourishment were centered in certain established areas and delivered first by horse and wagon and then by automobile. An elaborate system of "window cards" of different sizes and shapes and colors warned entrepreneurs when supplies of ice, meat or milk and groceries were running low.

My father was a prime member of this era having a meat route, a milk route, and an ice route he sponsored for his brother-in-law. I spent many a long day engaged in all 3 of these enterprises, especially the milk run which I managed for 2 of my college summers.

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When the automobile came in and with Henry Ford and his Model T, the entire picture changed. Enterprising individuals set up markets which were located in one spot. I remember the first of these at Hall's Corner. It was Barnes' Market and dealt in all sorts of needs including much to my father's dismay, meat. Father kept on believing that people would not want to go to the extra expense of driving to the market. But he was wrong, and gradually as more and more people began to use more and more automobiles, the "shopping center" was born and still flourishes today. Driving to a shopping center has become the norm of modern American home life. It is as part of American life as eating and breathing itself.

In fact, this custom and lifestyle has taken over the world. Travel has become the leading industry in many countries. Today in Hawaii in place of the dull gray fields of pineapple and the lighter shades of green from waving fields of sugar cane, there are housing developments and people are engaged in rediscovering ancient landmarks to show off to tourists. I was told on the last trip here that Hawaii would be bankrupt if it relied on the sugar and pineapple industries that dominated economic life when I taught school here 60 years ago.

Perhaps a final reflection is in order, that every great age of transition, such as ours, people get on the move and try to find new meaning for their lives as well as new economic situations. It must have been so in what history books called the "Great Age of Discovery" in the 15 to 18th centuries. Here new lands were settled and new sets of values were put in place and conflicts arose then as now between conservatives and liberals. The great fact is that the human race finds a way to adjust and while a temporary "rootless" condition prevails things do stabilize and civilization resumes its normal devious course.